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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000725

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR EUR/CACEN, INR

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: VIOLENCE DURING RALLY PROMPTS BROAD
CONDEMNATION

[1](#)1. (U) Sensitive But Unclassified. Treat Accordingly.

SUMMARY

[1](#)2. (SBU) An April 20 rally organized by The New Times Party in the city of Sevan (35 miles northeast of Yerevan) was disrupted when a scuffle between pro-government and anti-government supporters ended in a non-fatal shooting. One person was wounded and hospitalized as a result of the skirmish, the details of which are still unclear. New Times Party Chairman Aram Karapetian, whose year-long calls for revolution in Armenia have thus far met with lackluster reaction from both the public and analysts, immediately accused the authorities of initiating the violence. Others, including the police and both opposition and pro-government parties, instead blamed Karapetian for staging an unauthorized event that endangered the public. The New Times party has called on police authorities to make a full investigation of the incident. Karapetian himself is taking an active role in pushing for the investigation. During a series of previously scheduled protests in front of Yerevan Embassies on April 22 (including our Embassy), he was not among the few dozen supporters but instead giving a statement at the Prosecutor General's Office. End Summary.

RALLY ENDS IN SHOOTING

[1](#)3. (SBU) A rally organized by The New Times opposition party in the central Armenian city of Sevan on Wednesday turned violent when a verbal exchange between a group of veterans and party chair Aram Karapetian ended in a shooting. The police shot one of Karapetian's assistants (probably a bodyguard according to the limited information available) in the leg when a gun went off during one of the scuffle. According to reports, Karapetian's calls for a "colorless" revolution in Armenia angered some participants and triggered emotional remarks from the crowd. One of the impromptu speakers, who identified himself as a Karabakh war veteran, claimed that while he was fighting in Karabakh and building Armenian statehood, Karapetian "lived a happy life in Moscow and made money."

[1](#)4. (SBU) The police promptly issued a statement on the incident, blaming Karapetian for changing the location of the rally and for "unauthorized" activities. Karapetian angrily brushed off the accusations and qualified them as a "further provocation." He stopped short, however, of naming the pro-GOAM forces he had blamed for the incident. The New Times party has called on police authorities to make a full investigation of the incident. Karapetian is taking an active role in pushing for the investigation. During a series of previously scheduled protests in front of Yerevan Embassies on April 22 (including Post), he was not among the few dozen supporters but instead giving his statement at the Prosecutor General's Office.

COMMENT

[1](#)5. (SBU) After initial finger pointing about who may or may not have been the aggressor, parties on both sides of the political spectrum were quick to condemn the violence associated with the rally. In a strongly worded joint statement on April 22, major political parties (including coalition, opposition and non-aligned groups) condemned the incident and linked the right to peaceful protest with democratic principles. These parties called on the GOAM to properly investigate the shooting. A cynic might say that the GOAM's quick condemnation of the violence reflects its

desire that this event not trigger new support for the opposition; but even an opposition that tells us it is waiting (and hoping) for just this sort of trigger was not willing to rally around Karapetian in this case. The tempered response to date from Armenia's major political actors may be the most positive thing to emerge from this incident.

EVANS